

ABOUT MUSIC – By Mariss McTucker

Charlie Denison: *Whispers of the Lonely*

Produced by Justin Wade Tam,
recorded by Tam and Taylor
Grubbs at The Toaster,
Nashville, TN, 2011

Self-styled Lewistown “soul troubadour” Charlie Denison has released his first solo EP and it’s pretty darned good. Denison carries nice, original melodies with a strident and gravelly baritone vocal, sometimes reminiscent of Tom Waits. At other times, he sounds like he’s channeling influences like Steve Earle or Bruce Springsteen.

The recording sports a slew of Nashville session players as well: Daniel Ellsworth, piano; Kristen Rogers, backup vocals; Michael Butera, fiddle and viola; and Benjamin Jones, bass. Producer Justin Wade Tam, also a Nashville “cat,” contributes guitar, jharango, vocals and percussion. Hambone, a pal of Denison’s from Indiana University, plays electric guitar, and John Hayes, from Kentucky, is on drums and percussion.

Denison writes great lyrics, perhaps a testament to the fact that he’s also a journalist who reports for the *Lewistown News-Argus*. “The Man for You,” written by Denison and Wibaux songwriter Jim Devine, is a snappy country rocker with nice piano plunkin’ and electric guitar licks.

The bittersweet ballad “Without You Here,” co-written by Devine and Tam, is acoustic and mournful, with cool understated viola and Denison’s guitar. Denison does some great Ray Charles vocal licks on the slow blues number, “Sing You Along,” and Rogers contributes some wailin’ backup vocals, a la Charles’s Raylettes. There’s slippery electric pickin’ from Hambone, and a cool ending there.

Denison’s own “Hub City” has a country nuance, as he whispers the words in Waits-like fashion, on a visit to an old haunt, Chicago. Denison is originally from Indianapolis and it sounds like he spent a lot of time in the Windy City.

The soulful, slow dancer “Give Me a Try” shows off pretty piano chords; it’s a tender ballad about someone caught up by romance after being alone awhile. (“I looked in to the other side, no goin’ back to what I knew ...”)

The title tune has a country lilt and cookin’ traps; and the finale, a great cover of John Prine’s “That’s the Way the World Goes ‘Round,” is a cool, boogified dancer.

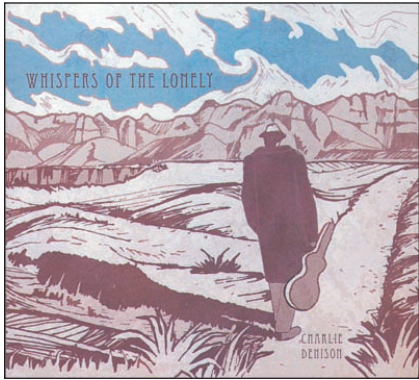
Smooth production, not overdone, perfectly complements Denison’s voice. Pick this one up.

Kung Fu Kongress:
Playin’ Hard to Get
Recorded live at Daly Jazz in
Missoula, engineered and
mixed by Andrew Saltzman,
Salt Shack Music and
Sound, Chicago; mastered
by John McCaig at Panic
Studios in Seattle, 2012

This seven-piece “funk band,” as drummer Campbell Youngblood-Petersen calls his compadres, features six other musicians from around the state. All but front man Cove Jasmin are part of the jazz program at The University of Montana. And boy, howdy, has this group learned its stuff.

It features a full horn and rhythm section, and gets you up on the dance floor with an energizing live sound.

The members are Cove Jasmin, keyboards; Owen Thayer, guitar and trombone; Trebor Riddle, electric and double bass; Youngblood-Peters-



en on drums, percussion and steel drum; Tully Olson, trumpet; Jake Syrenne on alto sax; and Tanner Fruit on alto sax. Guests on selected tracks are Brent Carmer on keyboards, Beth Youngblood-Petersen on violin, and producer Saltzman on electric bass.

Youngblood-Petersen, in biographical notes, says the band’s influences include the Dirty Dozen Brass Band and the Wailers, and newer groups like Dumpstaphunk and Soulive. I hear seminal nuances from trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, as well.

Their sound spans funk to soul to progressive jazz, and lots of stuff in between. Youngblood-Petersen and Thayer contribute, and the whole band gets writing credits, too, on the title tune, which blazes in with Jasmin on keyboards, disco-y and rockin’. The piece oozes with horns and jazzy guitar chords, the melody building and diffusing. Fruit wails in with a great sax riff, Jasmin underpins the improvisations, and the group returns to the opening theme in an all-out effort.

Thayer’s “Dangerous Khemicers” sleepwalks in, keys and drums softly rockin’. This one morphs yet has structure, reminiscent of some of Gillespie’s thematic albums of the 70’s, or of the atmospheric soundtrack work Mark Isham does in film.

“Tangarang” wanders in, with mesmerizing percussion and trumpet, and then out flies the big-band orchestra groove. The dance jive is set right away, horns blazin’, honkin’, snappy and toe-tappin’. Everyone gets to stretch out and show their chops. Yow!

Fuzzed unison notes and cool horn lines rev dissonantly up the scale, adding layers on the way, on “Paradiggum.” And the final piece, “Mood Chambers,” definitely creates a journey, with mellow steel drum and jungly ambience starting us off; then honkin’ baritone sax riffs light the way as many themes mash together about mid-stride. Near the end, Youngblood-Petersen and his mom Beth, on silky and electrified violin, re-create the opening mood, tying the piece together.

Good stuff here for all you dancers and aficionados who like terrific musicianship and a mind-bending, jazzy stew. These guys are going places. Superb live recording adds to the pleasure as well.

Christopher Mario *Bianco: Riding on a Rainbow*

Recorded and mastered at
Bitterroot Studio,
Hamilton; produced by
Chris Bianco and Earthan
Workshops and Studios,
Hamilton, MT, 2012

Hamilton musician Chris Bianco’s third album is chock-full of what he refers to as “naturally acoustic music.” It’s a relaxing compilation of nine originals – many of them mellow love songs – out of the more than 300 songs he’s written.

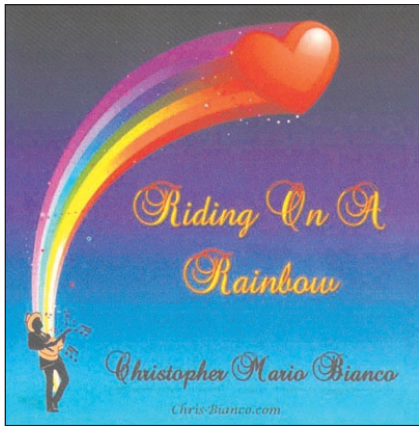
Bianco is a well-traveled troubadour, having performed throughout the Northwest and Wyoming, as well as British Columbia and Alberta. Many of the tunes are influenced by such music-makers as Dan Fogelberg, John Denver and Michael Martin Murphey. Bianco covers some of their tunes in his live performances. He appreciates their celebration of Earth, love and romance, and strives to accomplish that in his own material.

The first number, “Faith in Our Dreams,” opens with the easy cool snap of bossa nova; Bianco sings in unison with himself, no easy feat, in his likeable baritone.

Nice finger-pickin’ of bluesy notes fuels “Rescue Me,” with Bianco’s whispering, tremolo vocal refrains. The title tune is reminiscent of the hip California sound of the 1970s; it swings and sways with a samba feel.

Bianco shows his ’60s heart in “Sweatshirts and Old Blue Jeans,” a soft rocker with cool jazzy inflections, and he la-da-dahs some scat notes in unison with his guitar playing for a nice effect. There’s a country feel to the pretty waltz, “The Girl Inside My Dreams,” and Bianco shows his adept fretboard skill in “Beyond My Wildest Dreams,” with its mellow finger-pickin’ guitar.

The last number is a reprise of “Starlight in Your Eyes,” which Bianco calls the “raw” version. This is the guy for romantic musical ambiance. Visit him at Chris-Bianco.com.



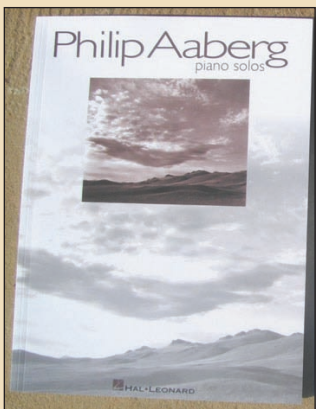
New folio features early piano works by Philip Aaberg

Hal Leonard Publishing recently reprinted a folio of sheet music containing 12 of Philip Aaberg’s early piano compositions.

Among the offerings are the classic pieces “High Plains,” “Marias River Breakdown,” “Upright,” “Westbound” and “Every Deep Dream.”

The Montana native’s first solo album on Windham Hill, *High Plains*, was released in 1984 to critical acclaim. It was the first non-classical album to get airplay on New York City’s premier classical music station KQXR.

The *Sunday Post* of Bridgeport, CT, said Aaberg composes “some of the most ‘American-sounding’



music since Aaron Copland. You’ll be missing a lot if you don’t give it the attention you would any serious musical work ... Music for the ages.”

Keyboard Magazine has described him as “an innovator in the stylistic neighborhood bordered by Aaron Copland, Charles Ives, Bruce Hornsby, and Keith Jarrett. It’s a uniquely American sound, at times poignant, brash, pensive, and bursting with enthusiasm. And sometimes, all of these emotions on the same page.”

Philip Aaberg: Piano Solos is available at shop.sweetgrassmusic.com.



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State of the Arts welcomes CDs

State of the Arts welcomes CD submissions by Montana musicians for inclusion in the About Music section. The recordings must be professional, commercially available, full-length CDs, with cover art and liner notes. Brief biographical information on band members would be helpful to the writer.

Please send submissions to either the Montana Arts Council, PO Box 202201, Helena, MT, 59620; or Lively Times, 33651 Eagle Pass Trl., Charlo, MT 59824.